

## Fact Sheet on Soring & the Horse Protection Act

Some horses that are shown for ribbons, trophies, and cash prizes are subjected to various forms of abuse. The Tennessee Walking Horse and other gaited breeds are victims of a particular type of abuse known as chemical or mechanical "soring". The Horse Protection Act was enacted in 1970 to protect all horses, but it came into being because of the abuses committed upon the Tennessee Walking Horse--abuses committed to this day and which have spread to other breeds.

With chemical soring, caustic substances are applied to the pastern area of the horse's front legs, then chains are affixed to the leg, causing the horse to snatch his painful front legs up off the ground and throw his weight onto the lower back, hips and rear legs. This creates the bizarre, exaggerated image of the "Big Lick" show horse. Some of the chemicals of choice used by the sorers include mustard oil, fuel oil and other petroleum products.

These chemicals cause terrible burning pain, internal tissue damage and characteristic scarring of the pasterns. When the USDA/APHIS recognized this, they created the No Scar Rule, which makes the showing of a scarred horse a violation of the Act. This, in turn, drove the sorers to using salicylic acid, which is applied liberally to the scarred areas to "burn off" the scarred skin, a procedure more painful than the chemical soring. The "new" skin is free of the grotesque granular calluses common in years past, but is still thickened and sparsely haired scar tissue. Many horses, after this "treatment" have "scurfing" on their pasterns but are passed during inspection by the industry-run Horse Industry Organizations (HIO's) when the USDA/APHIS is not present at their shows.

Note: The USDA/APHIS can afford to attend only 10% of these horse shows. Consequently, the number of soring and Scar Rule violations is significantly lower when the USDA is absent. (The enforcement of the HPA has seldom been fully funded by Congress, even to the 1970 limits, due to a vocal and influential lobby of soring supporters).

Mechanical soring can be just as damaging and painful for the horse, but is not prohibited by the Act. "Stacks" (up to 5" high and sometimes filled with a variety of substances, for added weight) are attached to the front hooves, causing the horse to stand perpetually in an elevated, unnatural position. Pressure shoeing causes chronic, constant pain and even some of the sore-horse trainers stop short of this despicable practice. Some flat-shod "pleasure" show horses are even abused, with heavy Plantation shoes (weighing up to 5 lbs.), accompanied by the occasional chemical "fix" and chains, which also produce the sought-after but artificial gait.

Horses that are "chemically sored" not only suffer the immediate pain produced by this abuse, but can also be subject to internal damage of the nervous system and organs. Mechanical soring causes damage to the tendons and joints of young show horses, many of which are subjected to this abuse from as young as 14 months of age, before their joints have matured and closed. The show careers of these unfortunate horses are often short-lived, and they have among the highest mortality rates and the lowest insurable ages (up to 12 years) of any breed, with the highest premiums.

**What You Can Do: Join FOSH, to support our efforts to end soring. Write, call or fax your Congresspersons annually during the federal budget cycle (early spring), and ask them to support full funding of the USDA's Horse Protection budget, to the 1970 level of \$500,000 authorized by the Act but never fully appropriated by Congress. Tell them that soring continues (despite the fact that the Act was passed over 30 years ago) and ask them to support the USDA's efforts to enforce the Act. Contact USDA and tell them that YOU support their efforts, and urge them to develop and use technology (including thermography and chemical testing) to detect soring at as many shows as it can attend. Tell your friends and colleagues about soring, and ask them to do the same.**